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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between scores on the multiple-choice General Educational Development (GED) Writing Skills test and scores on holistically graded essays. Secondary purposes included the following: (1) examining the relationship of essay scores to scores on the multiple-choice GED Reading Skills test and (2) examining the relationship of time spent in writing essays with scores on the essay tests. In the spring of 1984, the GED Testing Service holistically scored more than 2,300 essays written by a nationally representative sample of high school seniors. The students completed either the GED Writing Skills test or the GED Reading Skills test in conjunction with one, and in half of the cases, two, essay assignments. The three essay topics used in the study were designed in the rhetorical modes of description, persuasion, and exposition. Results indicated that students writing on more than one topic received different scores on different topics. The range of values for the correlations between the indirect and direct measures of writing indicates that there is a substantial relationship between the two, but that the essay and multiple-choice tests are measuring somewhat different skills. Similarly, the range of correlations between scores on essays in different rhetorical modes suggests that these modes tap slightly different writing skills. Finally, a positive but weak relationship was found for students writing on the description and persuasion topics. (Author/KC)

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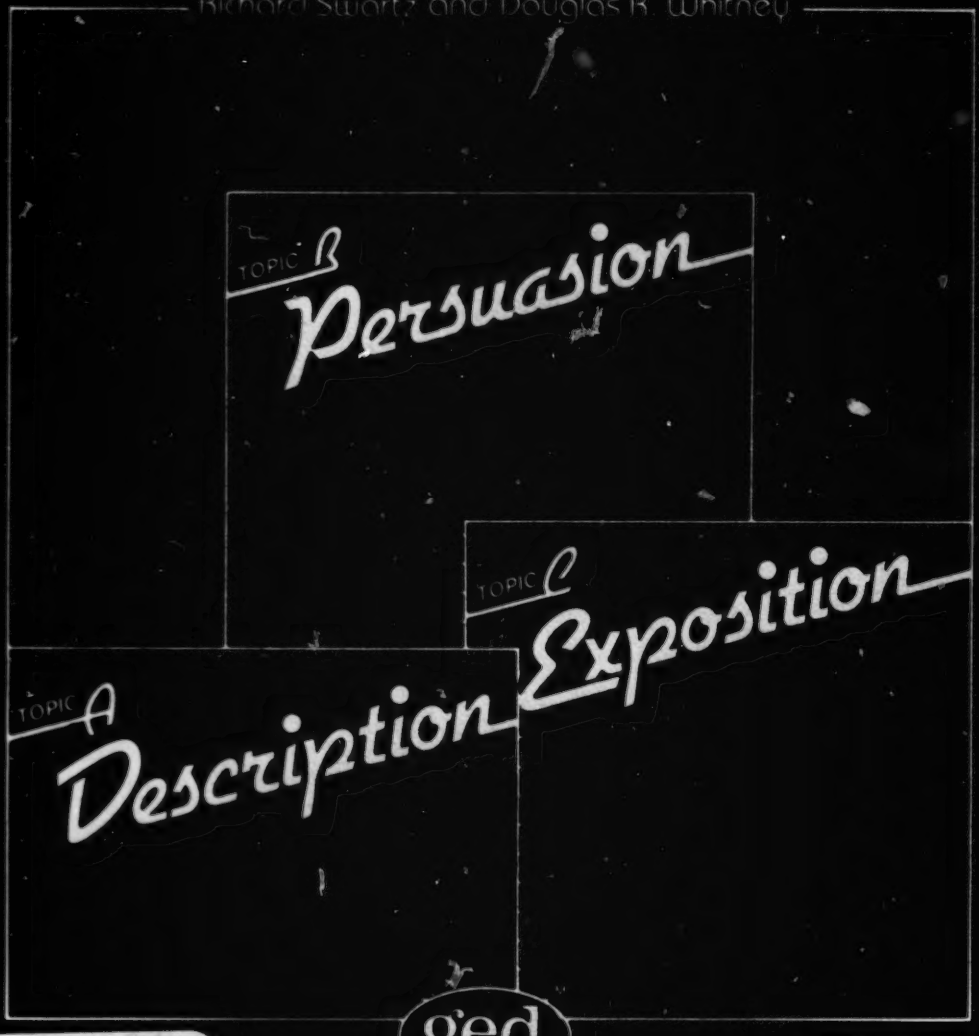
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCORES ON THE GED WRITING SKILLS TEST AND ON DIRECT MEASURES OF WRITING

Richard Swartz and Douglas R. Whitney



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GED TESTING SERVICE
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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT 5

BACKGROUND 5

METHOD 6

- Sample and Time Limits 6
- Topics 6
- Scoring Method 7
- Scoring Procedure 7

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION 7

- Reader Agreement 7
- Differences Among Topics 8
- Correlations of Writing Scores with Multiple Choice Scores 9
- Timing Studies 9

CONCLUSIONS 10

REFERENCES 10

APPENDIX A: 11

APPENDIX B: 12

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCORES ON THE GED WRITING SKILLS TEST AND ON DIRECT MEASURES OF WRITING

GED Research Studies, No.6, June 1985

Richard Swartz • Douglas R. Whitney

Abstract

The Writing Skills test of the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests) is a multiple choice (indirect) measure of writing, focusing on usage and editing skills rather than on composition. While the test is a reliable indicator of how well students can identify and correct errors in usage and mechanics, it does not directly measure a student's ability to write a composition. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between scores on the multiple choice GED Writing Skills test and scores on holistically-graded essays. Secondary purposes included 1) examining the relationship of essay scores to scores on the multiple choice GED Reading Skills test, and 2) examining relationships of time spent in writing essays with scores received on the essay tests.

In the spring of 1984, the GED Testing Service (GEDTS) holistically scored over 2300 essays written by a nationally-representative sample of high school seniors. The students completed either the GED Writing Skills test or the GED Reading Skills test in conjunction with one, and in half of the cases two, essay assignments. The three essay topics used in the study were designed to elicit the rhetorical modes of description, persuasion, and exposition.

Results indicate that students writing on more than one topic received different scores on different topics. Correlations of essay scores for students writing on more than one topic ranged from .54 to .65. The correlations between scores on the multiple choice Writing Skills test and scores on the essay ranged from .55 to .69, depending on the essay topic, while correlations between scores on the GED Reading Skills test and scores on the essay were between .53 and .58. This range of values for the correlations between the indirect and direct measures of writing indicates that there is a substantial relationship between the two, but that the essay and multiple choice tests are measuring somewhat different skills. Similarly, the range of correlations between scores on essays in different rhetorical modes suggests that these modes tap slightly different writing skills. A final aspect of the study examined the relationship between time used to write the essay and the essay score received. Results indicate a positive but weak relationship for students writing on the description and persuasion topics.

Background

The Writing Skills test of the Tests of General Educational Development (GED Tests) consists of 80 multiple choice questions in five content areas: spelling, capitalization and punctuation, usage, sentence structure, and logic and organization (Patience & Whitney, 1982). It is, thus, an indirect measure of writing—focusing on usage and editing skills rather than on composition skills. As with all such indirect measures, an element of the validity of the Writing Skills test is the degree to which its scores are correlated with direct measures of writing. Though high degrees of reliability have been demonstrated for multiple choice measures of writing, the validity of these indirect measures has been challenged frequently by writing teachers and administrators (Bamberg, 1982; Charney, 1984; Godshalk, 1966). As Breland (1983) observes, those who favor direct measures of writing have a compelling logic at their disposal: the best way to measure a person's mastery of a skill is to ask for a demonstration of the skill, not for a correlate of it.

In 1983, the GED Testing Service undertook a study of this aspect of the validity of the Writing Skills test. While the content areas of the Writing Skills test accurately reflect at least some of the skills necessary for effective writing, they measure these skills indirectly at best. Thus, while the current test may indicate quite well how effectively an examinee can identify and correct errors in usage or mechanics, it may or may not provide any useful information about the examinee's actual ability to write, a process that involves conception of ideas, generation of language, composing of sentences and paragraphs, marshalling of effective support for a generalization, and a host of other steps that are not—and perhaps cannot be—measured in the multiple choice format of the present test.

One of the important elements of the credibility of the GED credential (and, thus, an aspect of the Test's validity for its intended purpose) is its comparability to learning out-

comes and standards in American and Canadian high schools. For people who did not graduate from high school, successful completion of the GED Tests serves as a basis for the award of a high school diploma or an equivalency credential in all 50 states, many United States territories, and 10 Canadian provinces. Over the past decade, several states have begun to require writing proficiency for high school graduation, and many others conduct direct assessment of writing in one or more grades of high school (Education Commission of the States, 1984). If high school students are often required to demonstrate that they can write effectively, many reason, why are GED graduates not required to do so? As state legislatures and school governing bodies have considered adding a writing requirement for high school graduation, some have asked whether a similar requirement should be applied to the GED students as well. As a part of a regular test review process, the GED Testing Service conducted a series of surveys addressing program goals, test content, and test format (Spille, 1984). Various groups associated with the GED testing program were polled. Among the questions was the following: "Should the GED Tests contain a measure of the ability to produce original written communications?" In each group, (e.g., policy makers, state level GED administrators, examiners, teachers), a majority of respondents favored this change.

Finally, because the GED Tests are administered to about 800,000 students each year, an additional aspect of the study was to explore various questions related to the feasibility of adding an essay component to the Writing Skills test. How much time should be permitted? What kind of topic(s) should be used? How should the essay be scored? Could the essays be scored reliably? How should the scores be reported? These were among the various practical questions to be considered beyond the essential matter of estimating the correlation between multiple choice test scores and writing sample scores.

Method

Sample and Time Limits

In the fall of 1983, as part of a project to equate new forms of the GED Tests, three essay topics were administered to a national sample of high school seniors. The project included 170 high schools selected to be representative of all U.S. schools; the sample was drawn using stratifications of geographic region, school enrollment, district socioeconomic status, and type of control (i.e., public or private). In the equating study, the five tests in the battery (Writing Skills, Social Studies, Science, Reading Skills, and Mathematics) were spiralled, so that every fifth student in a local testing group received the Writing Skills test (Test One).

Because the maximum time limit for any of the five tests is ninety minutes, that amount of testing time was allowed for the entire testing group. The Writing Skills test, however, requires only seventy-five minutes, and the Reading Skills test only sixty. The essay questions were added to these two tests, giving students at least fifteen minutes to respond in the case of a question paired with Test One and at least thirty minutes in the case of a question paired with Test Four.

Reports from test administrators with experience in previous equating studies indicated that the high school students frequently did not use the full time available to them, so the fifteen and thirty minute time limits were viewed as the minimum time available; students who completed the multiple choice section of the test (Writing Skills or Reading Skills) before the time limit expired were free to proceed directly to the essay question and thus in many cases had available more than the minimum time allotted to them. Students were asked to indicate the time at which they began and completed writing their essays to determine the correlation between the amount of time spent on the writing task and the eventual score on the essay.

Topics

The topics to which students responded in this project were developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and used with permission (NAEP, 1980; see Appendix A). The NAEP topics were used because they had been administered to a national population of high school students and because each of the topics called for a response in a different rhetorical mode: description, persuasion, and exposition. Because one of the research questions to be addressed in the study was to evaluate the differences among responses to different rhetorical forms, the three topics were spiralled among the testing population, yielding an approximately equal number of papers on each topic. In addition, to determine whether students performed better on one topic than another, some students completing Test Four (Reading Skills) were required to write on two topics, the order of which was counterbalanced. The configurations of essay topics with multiple choice tests are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Configurations of Essay Topics with Multiple Choice Tests

Multiple Choice	Essay Topic(s)	Minimum Time Limit (Minutes)	Number of Students
1. Writing Skills	Description	15	233
2. Writing Skills	Persuasion	15	211
3. Writing Skills	Exposition	15	232
4. Reading Skills	Description	30	87
5. Reading Skills	Persuasion	30	80
6. Reading Skills	Exposition	30	82
7. Reading Skills	Description + Persuasion	30	169
8. Reading Skills	Description + Exposition	30	123
9. Reading Skills	Persuasion + Exposition	30	167
10. Reading Skills	Persuasion + Description	30	150
11. Reading Skills	Exposition + Description	30	193
12. Reading Skills	Exposition + Persuasion	30	142

Scoring Method

Considerable attention was given to selecting the best possible method for scoring the writing samples obtained from the high school students. Holistic scoring was selected as the optimal method for this study for several reasons. First, holistic scoring is a quick and relatively simple procedure, so it is an efficient method for scoring large numbers of papers. Because the GED Testing Service wished to consider the feasibility of essay scoring as one of the research questions, holistic scoring was a technique preferable to either analytic or primary trait scoring, both of which demand of essay readers more training and time per essay. Second, to answer the primary research question involving the correlation between essay and multiple choice scores, high degrees of inter-reader reliability were required, and holistic scoring offered the most accessible method of attaining that reliability (Cooper, 1977). An additional factor in the scoring method decision was the acknowledgement that, if a writing exercise were to be added to the GED Writing Skills test, practical constraints would limit the exercise to a single topic. This limitation further suggested the use of holistic scoring and the combination of a holistic essay score with multiple choice scores to yield a composite writing score. The relative unreliability of a holistic score on a single topic (Charney, 1984; Cooper, 1977) is mitigated appreciably when the score is combined with a more reliable indirect measure of writing (Godshalk, et al., 1966).

Holistic scoring is a method of evaluating a piece of writing based upon a paper's overall effectiveness. Often referred to as "general impression scoring," the method relies upon the idea that the effectiveness of a piece of writing does not necessarily equal the sum of its parts, and that informed essay readers can come to agreement about the worth of a whole piece of discourse while they may disagree about the relative value of its component parts (Conlan, 1976).

Because holistic scoring is essentially a process of rank ordering papers (Cooper, 1977), it is frequently observed that one of the limitations of the scoring process is that the ranking indicated by the scores varies according to the population which comprises the sample. That is, a high school student's paper scored as a "six" in one reading may become a "four" if placed among papers written by college graduates because the paper's rank changed in relation to the universe of papers of which it was a member. To control this drifting of standards, a scoring guide was developed for each topic. Three separate guides were written to reflect the clearly different purposes suggested by each of the topics. Because the guides were created inductively—by describing the common characteristics of the agreed-upon model papers—they could be regarded as descriptive rather than prescriptive. (See Appendix B).

Scoring Procedure

For the purposes of this project, only the papers written by students who completed the anchor form of the GED Writing Skills test or the GED Reading Skills test were selected for scoring. This sample of 2335 papers included 813 papers on the description topic, 747 on the persuasion topic, and 775 on the exposition topic. The papers on each topic were scored by a separate group of readers (8 readers each for description and persuasion; 6 for exposition), most of whom have had from three to five years of experience in holistic scoring. Prior to scoring the papers, readers were informed of the background of the project. They then reviewed the scoring guide for their particular topic and scored the set of rangefinder papers. Additional single sample papers followed the scoring of rangefinders until readers achieved consensus on papers. During the scoring process, readers' scoring accuracy was monitored periodically by the chief reader assigned for that topic. Each paper was scored independently by two readers; the two scores were combined to form a total essay score ranging from 2 to 12. When readers' scores varied from each other by more than one point, the papers were scored a third time and the average of the three scores was doubled and rounded off to produce an integer total score on the 2 to 12 scale.

Results & Discussion

Reader Agreement

The study confirmed the results reported by many others (Breland, 1983; White, 1985)—that writing samples can be scored holistically with a high degree of inter-reader agreement. On the average, readers agreed or gave a contiguous score in 93% of the cases, and this rate of agreement was approximately the same for all topics. The estimates of

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations For Essay Scores

Essay Score	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
	Essay Topic A: Description		
Unadjusted Scores	813	6.10	2.26
Adjusted Scores	813	6.09	2.26
	Essay Topic B: Persuasion		
Unadjusted Scores	747	6.52	2.40
Adjusted Scores	747	6.51	2.38
	Essay Topic C: Exposition		
Unadjusted Scores	775	6.57	2.06
Adjusted Scores	775	6.56	2.05

Notes:

1. Unadjusted scores are the total of the scores assigned by the original two readers.
2. Adjusted scores are twice the average of the scores asssigned by all three readers. (If the original scores differed by less than two points on the 6-point holistic scale, the adjusted score is the same as the unadjusted score.)

TABLE 3

Correlations Between Essay Scores For Three Readers

Topic	First & Second Readers	First & Third Readers	Second & Third Readers	Reader Reliability Unadjusted Scores
A. Description	.76	.56	.46	.87
B. Persuasion	.76	.45	.45	.86
C. Exposition	.69	.44	.50	.82

Notes

1. Sample sizes, by topic, for correlations between original two readers are, respectively, 813, 747, and 776.
2. Sample sizes, by topic, for correlations involoving the third reader are, respectively, 51, 51, and 59.
3. Reader reliabilities for the total (unadjusted) scores were obtained by applying the Spearman-Brown formula (with a lengthening factor of two) to the correlations between readers one and two. These values should be interpreted as the reader reliability for one essay based on the total score from two independent readings.
4. All tabled correlations are significantly different from zero when tested at a 5% significance level.

reader reliability reported in Table 3 represent the correlations between ratings (Breland, 1983; Coffman, 1971). This rate of reader agreement is well within generally accepted standards (Breland, 1983; Coffman, 1971; White, 1984).

It is the practice in some writing assessment programs using a six point scale to provide a third scoring to a paper only if readers' scores are more than two points apart. That is, such a procedure allows scores of 2 and 4 to stand uncorrected (as a total score of 6), while a paper receiving a 2 and a 5 would be scored a third time. The obvious advantage of such a procedure is the reduction in the number of third readings that are required. In this study, for example, if a discrepant score were defined as 3 or more apart instead of 2 or more apart, the number of papers requiring a third reading would have dropped from 154 to 10. The procedure in this study was to score all papers with scores 2 or more apart a third time; the three scores were then averaged and doubled to produce a total score. A total of 161 papers were scored a third time; the net result was no score change (on the total score scale of 2-12) for 78 papers (48%), less than a 1 point change for 76 papers (47%), and at least a 1 point change in only 7 (4%) of the cases.

The implication of this finding is that if scores as much as 2 points apart on a six point scale are added together, they will produce a score that is not practically different from the score produced by having the papers scored a third time. The finding has important ramifications in terms of the feasibility of large scale essay scoring since permitting scores two points apart to stand unadjusted in the current study would have reduced the number of additional readings by 93%.

Differences Among Topics

An important aspect of the study was to determine to what extent students achieved the same scores for essays written on different topics. Students in six of the twelve cells of the design wrote papers on more than one topic. Table 4 indicates the correlation coefficients of scores for students writing on two topics. The coefficients range from .54 for the description/exposition pairing to .65 for the description/persuasion pairing.

These findings serve to confirm what has been widely recognized in the profession: that topics which call for responses in different rhetorical modes often require somewhat different skills (Charney, 1984; Hoetker, 1982; Lloyd-

TABLE 4

Correlations Between Essay Scores For Persons Writing Two Essays

Topic	Topic A	Topic B	Topic C
A. Description	---	.65	.54
B. Persuasion	181	---	.60
C. Exposition	186	185	---

Notes:

1. Correlations are shown above the diagonal; sample sizes below the diagonal.
2. All tabled correlations are significantly different from zero when tested at a 5% significance level.

TABLE 5

Correlations of Essay Scores and Scores on the GED Writing Skills Test

Topic	Writing Skills (80 Items)	GED Test Scores: Spelling (10 items)	Capital. & Punct. (10 items)	Usage (24 items)	Sentence Correction (24 items)	Logic & Org. (12 items)
A.	.56	.39 (.49)	.46 (.56)	.53	.49	.45 (.53)
B.	.69	.53 (.62)	.52 (.61)	.63	.57	.56 (.63)
C.	.55	.34 (.43)	.47 (.57)	.50	.49	.42 (.50)

Notes:

1. Sample sizes for the three topics are, respectively, 304, 258, and 284.
2. Correlations in parentheses represent the expected correlation (using Spearman-Brown formulas) that would have been obtained if 24 items had been used for each content area.
3. All tabled correlations are significantly different from zero when tested at a 5% significance level.
4. The average correlation of scores on each of the five test sections with scores on the other four sections are: Spelling (.56); Capitalization & Punctuation (.61); Usage (.66); Sentence Correction (.68); Logic & Organization (.62). The average correlation between scores on these sections is .62.

Jones, 1977; White, 1985). In this study, the coefficients are at a level which signifies that the tasks—in every case—were substantially different from each other. This finding argues strongly for maintaining consistency in the design of essay topics if their results are going to be used to make fair comparisons among testing populations; use of topics requiring different skills introduces a significant variation in student scores.

Correlations of Writing Scores with Multiple Choice Scores

The primary objective of this study was to determine the extent to which scores on a direct measure of writing correlate with scores on a multiple choice measure. Table 5 shows the correlation coefficients, by topic, for the total Writing Skills test and for each of its parts.

The range of values for the coefficients indicates that there is a substantial relationship between the two measures, but that the two tests are measuring somewhat different skills. Of the three topics, the scores on the persuasion topic correlated most highly with the Writing Skills scores. The differences in correlations across topics is largely explained by differences in the variances of the essay scores (see Table 2). It is interesting to note that the usage section of the Writing Skills test yielded the highest correlation with the essay for each topic, though that correlation remained moderate (.50 to .63). As noted in the table, however, the correlations for the mechanics and logic and organization sections are based on fewer questions than those for the usage and sentence correction sections, so the magnitude of possible correlation for the former is restricted.

Correlations between GED Reading Skills test scores and essay scores were only slightly lower (ranging from .53 to .58) than were the GED Writing Skills/essay correlations. This finding is not surprising in the sense that one would expect highly verbal tests to correlate with another verbal test (the essay) at approximately equal levels. However, the fact that the Reading Skills/essay correlations are not markedly higher than those for the Writing Skills test underscores the distinctive character of the direct measure of writing.

Timing Studies

A final aspect of the study examined the relationship between time devoted to writing the essay and the score earned on the essay. As illustrated in Table 6, there were many significant (i.e., non-zero) relationships between time used and essay score achieved. The highest correlations were produced for the persuasion topic (.29 for all examinees; .22 to .47 for subgroups); this finding suggests that students may have earned slightly higher scores by taking the time to develop supporting arguments for their positions. Conversely, the description and exposition topics may not have required as much of the writer in the way of planning and deliberation.

TABLE 6

Correlations Between Essay Scores and Time Used for the Essay

Topic	All Examinees	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
A. Description	.22*	.23*	.09	.20*	.32*
	(648)	(233)	(87)	(169)	(150)
B. Persuasion	.29*	.24*	.47*	.22*	.45*
	(609)	(211)	(80)	(167)	(142)
C. Exposition	.12*	.09	.17	.11	.16
	(633)	(232)	(82)	(193)	(123)

Notes:

1. Group 1 consists of the examinees who completed one essay and the GED Writing Skills test; Group 2 those who completed one essay and the GED Reading Skills test; Group 3 those who completed two essays and the Reading Skills test, but took the named essay first; Group 4 also completed two essays and the Reading Skills test, but took the named essay second.
2. Correlations that are significantly different from zero when tested at a 5% significance level are denoted with an asterisk.
3. Sample sizes for each correlation appear in parentheses directly below the correlation.
4. The correlations between time used on the essay and GED Writing Skills standard scores (for all examinees) ranged from -.11 to .08; correlations between time used on the essay and GED Reading Skills standard scores ranged from -.05 to .11. None of these six correlations was significantly different from zero when tested at a 5% significance level.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that scores on the GED Writing Skills test, and to a lesser extent on the GED Reading Skills test, are clearly related to, but substantially different from, those on a direct test of writing proficiency. The study also indicates that a writing prompt which calls upon students to take and defend a position correlates most highly with the GED Writing Skills test, and that individual students perform at different levels of proficiency when responding to prompts on different rhetorical modes. Also confirmed in this study is that essays can be scored reliably using a holistic scoring system, and that a 20 to 30 minute time period is adequate for most students to respond to a prompt.

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Appendix A

Topic A: Description

"Describe Something" Excercise

Everybody knows of something that is worth talking about. Maybe you know about a famous building like the Empire State Building in New York City or something like the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Or you might know a lot about the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City or the new sports stadium in Atlanta or St. Louis. Or you might be familiar with something from nature, like Niagara Falls, a gigantic wheat field, a grove of orange trees, or a part of a wide, muddy river like the Mississippi.

There is probably something you can describe. Choose something you know about. It may be something from around where you live, or something you have studied in school. Think about it for a while and then write a description of what it looks like so that it could be recognized by someone who has read your description.

Name what you are describing and try to use your best writing.

Topic B: Persuasion

"Rec Center" Exercise

Some high school students have proposed converting an old house into a recreation center where young people might drop in evenings for talk and relaxation. Some local residents oppose the plan on the grounds that the center would depress property values in the neighborhood and attract undesirable types. A public hearing has been called. Write a brief speech that you would make supporting or opposing the plan. Remember to take only ONE point of view. Organize your arguments carefully and be as convincing as possible. Space is provided on the next three pages.

Topic C: Exposition

"Electric Blanket" Exercise

Suppose that on June 4, 1978, you ordered an electric blanket that Big Mart had advertised for $14.98. On June 15, you received a letter stating that the supply of electric blankets was temporarily exhausted, but that your order would be filled shortly. You have never received the electric blanket, but every month since then you have received a computerized bill for the $14.98.

Now after three months, you have recieved the letter below.

BIG MART INC.
P.O. Box 29
Buffalo, New York 14240

September 10, 1978

In reply refer to Account 643477

Dear Customer:

According to our records your account has been unpaid for three months. If there has been an error, please let us know what the problem is.

We hope that within ten days we will recieve $14.98. Otherwise, we will have to refer your account to our collection service.

Very truly yours,

Jason Jones
Account Manager

Pretend that you are Pat Brown and write a letter to Mr. Jones explaining why you never sent in the $14.98

Appendix B

SCORING GUIDE—DESCRIPTION

6 Organized and developed with a clear sense of direction and purpose; provides complete detail necessary for purpose; precision of diction and control of conventions; often distinctive voice, style, or approach to the topic.

5 Controlling central idea and supporting details; control of diction and convention; development, often quite detailed.

4 Must have controlling idea and supporting detail; some problems with organization, development, diction and convention, but not so severe as to distract seriously from the purpose of the paper.

3 Lacks the coherence and precision of upper half papers. Tends towards loosely controlled thought and diction; large generalizations, insufficient detail; has development and organization but little focus or organized detail, often a mere list.

2 Organization is random; paper lacks focus; diction is inaccurate or confused or vague; consistent problems with conventions. Despite these weaknesses, the paper does give some description and does show awareness of the need to give a picture.

1 Like 2, but problems are so severe as to suggest an inability to control language or thought.

SCORING GUIDE—PERSUASION

6 Controlling central idea clearly developed with highly persuasive evidence. Will often provide additional details beyond those provided in the prompt in order to supply convincing evidence. Precision of diction and control of conventions.

5 Controlling central idea developed with convincing evidence. Reasoned presentation of argument which avoids mere listing of evidence or generalizations. General control of diction and conventions. onvincing evidence.

4 Controlling central idea partially developed with relevant evidence or detail, but the argument may not be very persuasive. May have some errors in diction and conventions but not so severe as to distract from the argument.

3 Poorly organized and insufficient development, often listing evidence which may not be relevant to or persuasive in the support of the position in the paper. May contain errors in diction and conventions which distract from the purpose of the paper.

2 Frequent errors in diction and conventions. Haphazard organization and lack of development. Often a mere listing of generalizations of little or no persuasive value.

1 Like 2, but problems are so severe as to render the argument unclear and totally lacking in persuasive value.

SCORING GUIDE—EXPOSITION

6 Like 5, with some syntactic maturity and complexity; it may go beyond the information supplied and provide an individual voice.

5 Has sense of audience, clearly sets out information necessary to understand and solve the problem; economical (even skimpy); few mechanical problems, none major.

4 Weaker than 5, though still clear. Sets forth the problem with some background information. Writing is adequate.

3 Presentation of the problem is inadequate because of missing or scrambled information, organizational problems, or a significant number of distracting errors.

2 Message is unclear in various ways: substantial oral interference or other inappropriate diction, mechanical problems that force revisions in the mind or draw attention away from substance, or enough omissions or confusions to suggest the message intended would not get through.

1 Like 2, but so filled with confusion and error as to suggest incompetence.

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